

July 11, 2014

Beloved children's author Allan Ahlberg rejects Amazon-sponsored award

by Zeljka Marosevic

The children's author **Allan Ahlberg** responsible for beloved (and possibly the most English-sounding) children's books *The Jolly Postman*, *Burglar Bill* and *Each Peach Pear Plum* has shown that we can continue to love him now we're adults —because he's just **refused** to accept an award sponsored by **Amazon**.

In an open letter to *The Bookseller*, Ahlberg told how he was initially "delighted" to hear he'd won the inaugural Booktrust Lifetime Achievement Award, which was voted for by 120,000 school kids from around the country. But on learning that the award was sponsored by Amazon Kindle, he felt obliged to refuse it. In his [letter he writes](#):



Burglar bill: remind you of anyone?

The Amazon sponsorship deal is a mistake. Amazon's baleful influence on the British book trade is frequently referred to—see also what's happening with Hachette in America—but it is its position as "The UK's No1 Tax Avoider" (Ethical Consumer) that bothers me.

Tax, fairly applied to us all, is a good thing. It pays for schools, hospitals—libraries! When companies like Amazon cheat—paying 0.1% on billions, pretending it is earning money not in the UK, but in Luxembourg— that's a bad thing. We should surely, at the very least, say that it is bad and on no account give it any support or, by association, respectability.

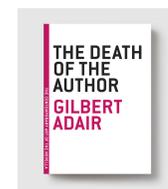
While Ahlberg praised Booktrust, an organization that aims to "change lives through reading", he pointed to a major problem with the charity associating itself with Amazon:

...Amazon, via its sponsorship, gets up close to Booktrust and hopes that some of this rubs off. Sadly, I'd say, it also works the other way: Amazon sponsors Booktrust; Booktrust sponsors Amazon, and all of us— writers, illustrators, publishers, judges—get drawn in.

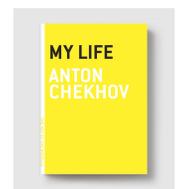
Ahlberg is refusing to have his name, and his life's work, associated with a business that is radically dismantling the current reading and writing ecosystem, shown most clearly in the recent author outcry against [Amazon's treatment of Hachette titles](#). His letter is a reminder that Amazon are *still* not paying their taxes in Britain, despite [repeated calls to do so](#) by

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citizens, the media and government. This surely makes Amazon's involvement with Booktrust a contradiction in terms: they give with one hand, while taking away with another.

In declining the award, Ahlberg sends out a clear and valuable message to all of his avid, small readers: "kids, when you grow up, pay your taxes— or else!" I hope parents up and down the country will be explaining this to their kids during bedtime stories tonight, with Amazon featuring as the big bad monster of society.

Zeljka Marosevic is the managing director of Melville House UK.



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